

A Critical Stylistic Analysis of Refutation in American Presidential Debates

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Abstract

This current study investigates the linguistic construction of refutation in American presidential debates from a Critical Stylistic perspective. Refutation, as a strategic response to counter-arguments, is examined in the U.S. presidential debates of 2020 and 2024 between Donald Trump and Joe Biden, focusing on how critical stylistic tools reflect ideological stance and persuasive intent. The problem of this study addresses the lack of comprehensive studies that analyze refutation beyond overt contradiction, exploring instead its textual-conceptual structures and ideological meanings. The study aims at identifying how candidates employ critical stylistic tools to construct refutation, determining which tools are most dominant, and analyzing their ideological and persuasive effects. For the purpose of achieving these aims, the study applies an adapted model of Critical Stylistics proposed by Lesley Jeffries (2010), selecting six tools for their direct relevance to refutation strategies: Naming and Describing, Representing Actions/Events/States, Implying and Assuming, Equating and Contrasting, Negating, and Prioritizing. A mixed methods approach is adopted, integrating quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative examination of linguistic patterns to capture both functional and distributional dimensions. The findings reveal that “Representing Actions/Events/States” and Naming and Describing” emerge as dominant tools, enabling candidates to construct aggressive ideological frames. They also show that Trump relies more heavily on Representing Actions/Events/States and Implying and Assuming to frame opponents’ actions ideologically and employ indirect insinuation, while Biden emphasizes Prioritizing and Negating to prioritize major issues and reject accusations. Both candidates employ Equating and Contrasting similarly but with different rhetorical tones— confrontational and binary in Trump’s case, and value-based and conciliatory in Biden’s. The study concludes that refutation in presidential debates is a multilayered discursive act shaped by strategic linguistic choices and ideological framing, contributing to the understanding of political discourse and Critical Stylistics analysis. Furthermore, it

also offers recommendations and suggestions for future studies based on the analysis and discussion of the results.

Keywords: (refutation, critical stylistics, naming and describing).

التحليل الأسلوبي النقدي لدحض الحُجج في المناظرات الرئاسية الأمريكية

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الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة البنية اللغوية لخطاب الدحض في المناظرات الرئاسية الأمريكية من منظور الأسلوبية النقدية. ويُنظر إلى الدحض بوصفه استجابة استراتيجية للحجج المضادة، حيث جرى تحليل استخدامه في المناظرات الرئاسية الأمريكية لعامي ٢٠٢٠ و ٢٠٢٤ بين دونالد ترامب وجو بايدن، مع التركيز على كيفية توظيف أدوات الأسلوبية النقدية في عكس المواقف الأيديولوجية وتحقيق المقاصد الإقناعية. وتتمثل مشكلة هذه الدراسة في النقص الواضح في الدراسات الشاملة التي تتناول الدحض بما يتجاوز مجرد النقض الصريح، إذ تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف بنيته النصية-المفاهيمية ودلالاته الأيديولوجية. تهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد كيفية توظيف المرشحين للأدوات الأسلوبية النقدية في بناء خطاب الدحض، ومعرفة الأدوات الأكثر هيمنة، وتحليل آثارها الأيديولوجية الإقناعية. ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف، تطبق الدراسة نموذجًا مكثفًا من الأسلوبية النقدية اقترحه ليزلي جيفريز (٢٠١٠)، باختيار ست أدوات لصلتها المباشرة باستراتيجيات الدحض، وهي: التسمية والوصف، وتمثيل الأفعال/الأحداث/الوقائع، والإيحاء والافتراض، والمساواة والمقابلة، والنفي، وإعطاء الأولوية. وقد تم اعتماد منهج مختلط يدمج بين التحليل الكمي للتكرارات والتحليل النوعي للأنماط اللغوية، بهدف الكشف عن الأبعاد الوظيفية والتوزيعية معًا. كشفت النتائج أن أداتي تمثيل الأفعال/الأحداث/الوقائع والتسمية والوصف تمثلان الأدوات المهيمنة، مما مكن المرشحين من بناء أطر أيديولوجية حادة. كما أظهرت أن ترامب يعتمد بدرجة أكبر على تمثيل الأفعال/الأحداث/الوقائع والإيحاء والافتراض لعرض أفعال الخصم في إطار أيديولوجي وتوظيف التلميح غير المباشر، في حين يركز بايدن على إعطاء الأولوية والنفي لتسليط الضوء على القضايا الكبرى ورفض الاتهامات. ويستخدم كلا المرشحين أداة المساواة والمقابلة بطريقة متشابهة، لكن بنبرات خطابية مختلفة؛ إذ يتسم خطاب ترامب بالواجهة والتنائية الحادة، بينما يتسم خطاب بايدن بالقيمة والنزعة التصالحية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الدحض في المناظرات الرئاسية يُعد فعلاً خطابياً متعدد الطبقات، يتشكل من خلال خيارات لغوية استراتيجية وإطار أيديولوجي، مما يسهم في فهم الخطاب السياسي وتحليل الأسلوبية النقدية. كما تقدّم الدراسة توصيات ومقترحات لدراسات مستقبلية تستند إلى تحليل ومناقشة نتائجها. الكلمات المفتاحية: (التفنيد، الأسلوبية النقدية، التسمية والوصف).

Introduction

1.1 The Problem

This study addresses this linguistic and analytical gap by exploring how candidates use certain textual and conceptual tools to construct refutation. By concentrating on language as the medium of ideological conflict, this study shifts the focus from behavioral strategy to linguistic structure, providing a better look at how refutation operates in political debates as a powerful discursive tool for asserting dominance. This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do candidates in American presidential debates construct refutation linguistically, using Jeffries' (2010) Critical Stylistics framework?
2. Which critical stylistic tool is most dominant in shaping refutation across the debate parts, and what are its ideological implications?
3. What ideological impacts are achieved through the combination of critical stylistic tools in constructing refutation?
4. How do the frequency and structure of refutation contribute to candidates' dominance and strategic control in the debate?

1.2 The Aims

The study aims at:

1. Identifying the linguistic construction of refutation in the American presidential debate through the perspective of critical stylistics.
2. Determining the most frequently used critical stylistic tool in refutation and interpreting its persuasive and ideological role.
3. Exploring how the strategic combination of critical stylistic tools contributes to the ideological effects of refutation in presidential debates.
4. Examining how the frequency and linguistic structuring of refutation affect the candidates' ability to assert dominance and shape the course of the debate.

1.3 The Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

1. Refutation is linguistically constructed not merely through overt disagreement, yet through a combination of deeper textual-conceptual functions that emphasize contrast, denial, and ideological positioning.
2. The tool of “Naming and Describing” is expected to be the most dominant, suggesting the candidates depend more on word choices to subtly undermine and discredit their opponents.
3. The interaction of tools like Representing Actions/Events/States, Negating, and Prioritizing reinforces the ideological impact of refutation by either validating the speaker’s position or casting doubt on the opponent’s credibility.
4. The candidates who use refutation more frequently and structure it, employing critical stylistic tools, are more likely to assert discursive dominance and control the debate’s direction.

1.4 The Procedures

1. Carrying out this study will include the following steps:
2. Conducting a comprehensive theoretical background about the theory of the study and the concept.
3. Designing an analytical model based on Jeffries’ (2010) Critical Stylistics, including six tools with their subcategories.
4. Collecting purposely samples from American presidential debates 2020 and 2024 to be the data of the study.
5. Applying a mixed approach (qualitative and quantitative methods) for the analysis.
6. Discussing the findings and statistical analysis quantitatively, to measure the frequency of stylistic tools.
7. Concluding the study, recommendations, and offering suggestions for future studies.

1.5 The Limits

The current study is limited to linguistic and stylistic aspects of the analysis, and special emphasis is paid to the critical stylistic features that are used in constructing refutation. It specifically deals with how candidates during the American presidential debates linguistically construct their

counter-arguments and how they challenge the position of the opponent. The scope of the study is limited to the chosen presidential debates in America (2020 and 2024) between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. The genre being investigated is political speech, and the analysis focuses only on the spoken responses and interactive exchanges among the candidates. Furthermore, the study is analyzed according to the adapted model based on Jeffries' (2010) Critical Stylistics framework, concentrating on six textual-conceptual tools. Such tools are examined to uncover the linguistic construction and ideological implications of refutation within the debate.

1.6 The Value

This study is hopefully supposed to be significant for those interested in Critical Stylistics, Political Linguistics, and argumentative studies. By applying Jeffries' (2010) model to the phenomenon of refutation, it sheds light on how ideological meanings are constructed through linguistic choices. Additionally, it offers practical insights into the stylistic strategies politicians use to assert power and influence public perception.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Style and Stylistics: Definitions

Stylistics is a branch of macrolinguistics that specializes in analyzing and researching a writer's or an individual's style. It addresses speech as well as literary and nonliterary writings (Baldick, 2001; Hashim, 2018). In contrast, stylistics is a style of text interpretation that focuses exclusively on language, according to Simpson (2004). Because of the different forms, patterns, and levels of linguistic structures, stylists find language to be extremely important. These language structures serve as a crucial indicator of the text's purpose.

The term style originates from the Greek and Latin word "stilus," which can be described as a tiny stick that the Romans used to write on tables made of wax. These days, the term 'style' is used interchangeably and has become ambiguous (Tayeva & Orazbekova, 2020). Style is defined as the unique application of language for certain goals by Verdonk (2002) and Finch (2003). Distinct decisions might result in the production of distinct looks and impacts. As Van Gelderen and Strazny (2005, p. 1043) state that the definitions of style vary in many ways, such as "a choice of language

means,” “deviation from a norm,” “recurrence of linguistic form,” and “comparison.” Davies (2007) also makes a reference concerning Widdowson's definition of stylistics in (1975), which is a discipline that combines literature and language. Thus, stylistics deals with literary and non-literary genres, helping the readers understand their contents and elucidating their mechanisms. Because of this, the stylist is more focused on the impact of a given text than on whether it is written in English or another dialect of the language.

2.2 Critical Stylistics: An Overview

As a response to the growth of CDA and as a very visible approach to linguistic ideology, CS has emerged (Jeffries, 2014). A subfield of stylistics called “critical stylistics” is devoted to the analysis of texts from a critical viewpoint. It aims to demonstrate how texts present the reader or hearer with the reality and conceal ideological meaning (Ahmed & Abbas, 2021). In contrast, Jeffries (2010) states that the primary aim of critical stylistics is to detect the ideological meaning in both literary and non_liteary genres. The stylist Simpson, the discourse analyst Fairclough, the critical linguist Fowler, and Jeffries have all used a variety of earlier tools, which are essentially the same (at least semantically and pragmatically) as more conventional tools like modality and transitivity. To address the lack of form-function mapping, they differ from the earlier critical linguistic and CDA tools in that they express several linguistic features in their form and function (Jeffries, 2010).

Critical stylistics is a stylistic approach to language study that emphasizes the social meanings that language conveys. Lesley Jeffries created and developed this linguistic approach in 2007 as a means of examining the prevailing discourses in society about the female body and how language both permits and restricts women's ability to live their lives. “Critical stylistics” is the study of the fundamental roles that texts play in forming reality, or the degree to which writings influence the world. The language and organization of the writings themselves make this clear. “When Jeffries attempted to explain how language may limit and dominate women in their lives in 2010, the term “critical stylistics” was born out of the study of the feminine body in women's magazines,” (Tabbert, 2016).

2.3 Framework of Critical Stylistics

According to Jefferies (2010) state that there are ten tools for revealing the linguistic features of critical stylistics. These ten tools can be listed as follows:

2.3.1 Naming and Describing

Naming and describing examine the various ways that particular texts (and their writers indirectly) might select from language's everyday resources to convey a worldview. It is the process by which people, places, and objects are regularly named in language, together with the several ways in which these things might be explained. In a given context, the many ways that things are named and described can have ideological implications.

For example, if someone refers to or describes a group as being "freedom fighters," it can change the viewpoint of the people.

2.3.2 Representing Actions/Events /States

The verb used to describe an event determines whether it is an action, event, or state within a phrase. According to Jeffries (2010), the receivers' perceptions of the situation can influence the ideological impact of each option. Simpson's (1993) version of Halliday's transitivity model serves as the foundation for this textual-conceptual function. In other words, transitivity choices are used to indicate this tool. For example, material verbs (move), mental verbs (feel), etc (Jeffries, 2010).

2.3.3 Equating and Contrasting

Jeffries (2010) defines equating as the use of synonyms, even though many linguists believe that there are no identical synonyms, and even near-synonyms are not actually comparable, with each having its own connotations. Jefferies (2010) defines contrasting as the utilization of opposition. According to Tabbert (2016, p. 103), opposition includes both traditionally acknowledged "binary opposites," such as black/white, and textually created opposition between seemingly unrelated concepts. Jeffries (2010), in her book "The Power of English," mentions that there are several types of equating and contrasting, which can be listed as follows:

Types of equivalence: Firstly, intensive relational like: become, appear, is, think, made, to be, cause, etc. Secondly, appositional equivalence occurs when two noun phrases refer to the same entities, like: The doctor,

“Mr. Smith,” is my brother. Thirdly, parallel structures are the use of the same grammatical patterns, like: “Easy go, easy come.”

Finally, metaphorical equivalence is the use of metaphorical meaning to convey the ideological impact within the texts, like: “Time is a thief.”

Types of contrasting: Firstly, negated expressions like not, no, etc. Secondly, transitional expressions like turn into, and from...to. Thirdly, comparative expressions like more or less. Thirdly, replacive like: rather than, instead of, etc. Fourthly, concessive expressions, like: despite, yet, etc. Fifthly, explicit expressions, like: by contrast with, and as opposites to. Sixthly, the use of parallelism. Such as he likes and she likes. Finally, contrastive expressions like the use of but.

2.3.4 Exemplifying and Enumerating

Because they are incompatible linguistically and necessitate the hearer or reader to rely on pragmatic inference, enumerating and exemplifying are two connected and overlapping textual devices. In English, some standards designate certain lists as being more thorough than others. In certain situations, there are also a few explicit enumeration and exemplification markers that aid in this distinction. The three forms of lists stated above are two-part, three-part, and four-part lists, each with unique ideological implications and applications. Politicians frequently use the three-part lists as a rhetorical device because, for example, they are considered to be symbolically comprehensive, which indicates that all potential topics have been addressed. This tool consists of expressions like one list, two lists, three lists, and the use of “for example” (Jeffries, 2010).

2.3.5 Prioritizing

One aspect of textual meaning that neatly lies at the intersection of decontextual systematic language structure and its application in context is the placement of information in major or subordinate structures. In other words, this tool is concerned with syntactic structures or elements to achieve some ideological content or meaning, and this tool consists of three major subcategories: information structure, transformation, and subordination (Jeffries, 2010).

2.3.6 Implying and Assuming

According to Jeffries (2010), pragmatics focuses on language's implicit rather than explicit meanings. Language has the potential to project naturalised beliefs and affect others' worldviews through assumption and implicature, making it a strong tool. In other words, this tool relates to pragmatics, more especially to existential and logical assumptions (presuppositions) and implicature.

2.3.7 Negating

According to Jeffries (2010), negating might make an argument that is entirely different from the one that is supported by the text in the readers' or the reader's mind. In other words, this tool has three levels: syntactic, lexical, and morphological. It also means creating worlds that don't exist. Like (not, un, dis, etc.)

2.3.8 Hypothesizing

This tool is concerned with the use of modality: epistemic, deontic, and boulomaic. For example, may, must, probably, obligatory, etc. In other words, taking into account the imagined scenario that modality creates, this textual-conceptual tool examines the role that modality plays in the ideology of the text. This implies that the imagined event or process itself is still mostly hypothetical, regardless of the text producer's opinion of the veracity or appropriateness of a certain course of action (Jeffries, 2010).

2.3.9 Presenting Speech and Thought of Others

This tool is concerned with presenting the opinions of others by referring to their direct and indirect speeches with the use of quotation marks. Moreover, this textual-conceptual role has to do with how authors of texts cite other people, which might entail editing and emphasizing particular ideological connotations (Jefferies, 2010, p. 130).

2.3.10 Presenting Time, Space, and Society

This tool is concerned with the textual processes that create some of the social world variables in which human participants operate, as well as the most fundamental time and space features for a text world. There is one language design that conceptually embraces all of the verbal realizations of time, place, and the human interactions that form society, even if there are many different ways to explain them. (Jefferies, 2010, pp. 148_149).

2.4 Refutation: Definitions and Concept

A refutation involves presenting a point that challenges or undermines an argument in such a way that it is obvious that the argument is incorrect. The term “refutation” is derived from the verb “refute,” which refers to the act of disproving an argument. The word “refute” was first used in the 1500s and was derived from the Latin word “refutare,” which not only meant “to refute” but also implied suppressing or holding something back, similar to how a refutation counters and suppresses the validity of an opposing argument by challenging its claims (Study, n.d.).

Refutation denotes the act of disproving or contesting an argument. It can be understood in three main senses (Word Web Online, n. d.).

1. It refers to the act of demonstrating the falsity of a statement, claim, or argument, highlighting its role as logical falsification. For example, “His refutation of the data invalidated the entire study.”
2. It encompasses the provision of evidence that directly undermines or contradicts a prior claim, positioning refutation as a form of counterevidence. For example, “The new archaeological findings provided a refutation of the previous historical theory.”
3. It represents a speech act through which a speaker directly answers and negates an attack on their standpoint, thus framing it as an essential rhetorical and dialogic strategy in argumentative discourse. For example, “His refutation of the charges was short and persuasive.”

2.5 Functions of Refutation

Refutation is a crucial part of an argumentative speech because it deals with the opposition, strengthens the speaker’s position, and actively engages the audience. More significantly, debaters frequently engage in refutation not only to critique or attack their opponents’ claims, but also to protect their own arguments. Fahnestock and Secor (1990, p. 307) extend the definition of refutation as “an indispensable part of all successful arguments”. They view it as a form of implicit dialogue with an anticipated opposing perspective. Depending on related studies (Ibsch, 1997), it can be identified several key functions of refutation:

Refutation works to expose the weaknesses or invalidity of an opponent’s arguments and viewpoints.

1. It allows the audience to realize their position and position themselves in support of the speaker's position or cause. it aims to reinforce the legitimacy of the speaker's stance and to encourage the audience to recognize and endorse it
2. It provides grounds for portraying the speaker's own perspective as more compelling or advantageous, even when acknowledging that the opposing position may not be entirely flawed.
3. It seeks to engage the audience by drawing on shared cultural values, common experiences, and emotional appeals, thereby fostering shifts in opinion.
4. It functions as a persuasive strategy to elicit favorable responses and greater public support for the speaker's cause.

2.6 Strong Refutation and Weak Refutation

Refutation, as a successful tool employed in political debates, can be stronger or weaker. Ilie (2009) highlights the concept of strong and weak refutations in a previous perspective. He claims that there is a notable distinction between strong and weak refutations. In a weak refutation, it is sufficient to raise "doubt upon the attacked standpoint, without a defence of the opposite standpoint," but in a strong refutation, the viewpoint is attacked by demonstrating that the proposition is incorrect while the opposite, or contradictory, proposition is acceptable (Ilie, 2009). Consequently, it is contended that the extent of refutation is linked to the specific sort of micro-speech act employed to provoke it.

Similarly, Wood & Irvine (2004) identify two distinct concepts of refutation: falsifying refutation, which seeks to directly refute or invalidate a claim, and non-falsifying refutation, which aims indirectly to undermine, weaken, or put doubt on an argument rather than completely disprove it. They state that "non-falsifying refutations are in no sense proofs against the propositions they refute... Falsifying refutations are proofs in some sense, but they are not proofs in every sense" (Woods & Irvine, 2004, p. 82).

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection and Description

The choice of 2020 and 2024 U.S. presidential debates as the data to be analyzed in this current study is both methodologically well-grounded

and contextually relevant, aligning closely with the aims of the study and its analytical framework. These debates can be seen as one of the most recent and high-visibility political conflicts that are characterized by an increased level of ideological polarization, a set of serious global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, and ongoing national discussions of democracy, governance, and social justice.

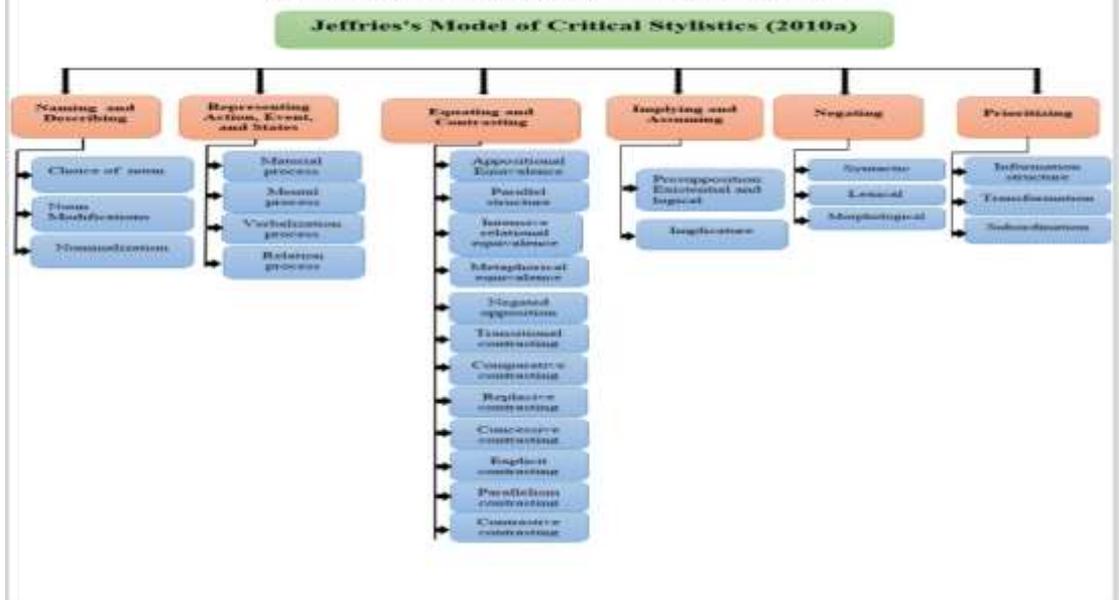
3.2 Methods of Analysis

Mixed methods research combines the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the data. Creswell (2009), mixed method research is “research in which the researcher collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry.” The combination of the qualitative insights with the quantitative trends enables researchers to interpret the patterns revealed through statistical analysis, the underlying meanings, and contextual nuances. As Börnyei (2007, p. 45) observes, this integration allows “words to illuminate numbers and vice versa”, fostering a richer and more balanced interpretation of research findings. Consequently, this current study will employ a mixed methods approach, offering a thorough explanation for understanding the phenomenon of refutation in presidential debates.

3.3 Model of Analysis

The current study will be conducted using an adapted model related to CS and refutation. The researcher selects only six tools from Jeffries’ (2010) Critical Stylistics framework, Naming and Describing, Representing Actions/Events/States, Implying and Assuming, Equating and Contrasting, Negating, and Prioritizing, as they have a strong relevance to the study that focused on refutation in political discourse. Such tools are especially effective in demonstrating how political figures create refutation and use both overt and covert linguistic methods to do so.

Figure (3.1): The Adapted Model of Critical Stylistics



4. Results Analysis and Discussion

4.1 The Analysis of Trump's Speech

Extract 1

"TRUMP: First of all, I called my accountants — under audit. I'm going to release them as soon as we can. I want to do it, and it will show how successful, how great this company is. But much more importantly than that, people were saying \$750. I asked them a week ago, I said, what did I pay? They said, Sir, you prepaid tens of millions of dollars. I prepaid my tax. Tens. Over the last number of years. Tens of millions of dollars, I prepaid, because at some point, they think it's an estimate. They think I may have to pay tax. So, I already prepaid it. Nobody told me that... And it wasn't written whenever they write this. They keep talking about \$750, which I think is a filing fee. But let me just tell you, I prepaid millions and millions of dollars in taxes, number one. Number two, I don't make money from China; you do. I don't make money from Ukraine, you do. I don't make money from Russia. You made three and a half million dollars, Joe, and your son gave you. They even have a statement that we have to give 10% to the

big man. You're the big man, I think. I don't know, maybe you're not. But you're the big man, I think. Your son said we have to give 10% to the big man. Joe, what's that all about? It's terrible... I get treated worse than the Tea Party got treated. A lot of people in there, deep down in the IRS, they treat me horribly. We made a deal, it was all settled, until I decided to run for president. I get treated very badly by the IRS, very unfairly, but we had a deal all done. As soon as we're completed with the deal, I want to release it. But I have paid millions and millions of dollars. And it's worse than paying. I paid in advance. It's called prepaying your taxes."

1. Naming and Describing

Noun choice:

"They even have a **statement** that we have to give 10% to the big man."

The word "statement", an abstract noun, refers to an alleged declaration or evidence concerning financial dealings involving Biden and his son. Trump, here, uses this term to anchor his refutation of Biden's integrity. The noun "statement" triggers a sense of authority or credibility to the claim, indicating that the information is verifiable or documented. This witty move creates an authoritative narrative around Biden's supposed involvement while strategically avoiding factual responsibility.

2. Noun Modifications:

"You're **the big man**, I think. **Your son** said we have to give 10% to the big man. Joe, what's that all about? It's terrible."

Trump presents himself as someone who pays taxes in advance, while he uses several derogatory descriptions to portray Biden and his family negatively. The phrase "big man" represents a strategic noun modification. The adjective "big" adds ideological effect to the neutral noun "man"; it metaphorically suggests control, authority, and behind-the-scenes influence. In this statement, the phrase is used to imply that Biden was secretly at the centre of a money-sharing arrangement. By labelling Biden as "the big man," Trump indirectly accuses him of unethical conduct without explicitly saying it. The act of naming and describing affects people ideologically because it delegitimizes Biden by linking him with corruption while reinforcing Trump's image as financially transparent.

In addition, the possessive pronoun “your” links the noun “son” directly to Biden, creating a personal association. This phrase further links Biden with the alleged statement, suggesting complicity or knowledge of the situation. This modification directs attention toward personal integrity instead of policy debates, which undermines Biden’s credibility through his family, presenting him as someone involved in or benefiting from doubtful financial schemes.

In terms of “**Nominalization**”, it has null existence. And it is worth mentioning that this type of subcategory has a similar case for the other analyzed samples.

Representing Actions/Events/States

“I **called** my accountants — under audit. I’m **going to release** them as soon as we can. I **want to do** it, and it will show how successful, how great this company is... I **prepaid** my tax. Tens”. (**Material Action Intentional**)

In these statements, Trump employs MAI processes to refute accusations regarding his financial transparency and tax obligations. Verbs such as “called”, “want to do”, and “prepaid” refer to intentional actions performed by Trump, assigning his agency and responsibility. By framing these actions as intentional and proactive, Trump projects himself as someone who acts responsibly while being transparent and financially accountable. This presentation functions as a direct refutation of claims related to financial secrecy or tax evasion, shifting the narrative to emphasize his tax compliance and financial achievement. Additionally, the delay in releasing his taxes is portrayed as an unavoidable result of outside factors, rather than personal resistance. According to other types of processes, they have null existence.

3. Equating and Contrasting

“I don’t make money from China, you do. I don’t make money from Ukraine, you do. I don’t make money from Russia. You made three and a half million dollars, Joe, and your son gave you”. (**Negated Oppositions**)

Trump structures his refutation using Negated Oppositions; he says in each sentence something good about himself and something bad about Biden to present Biden as dishonest. These negated oppositions employ syntactic

parallelism to assert a binary contrast in which Trump is clean and Biden is corrupt. This rhetorical structure guides the audience to interpret Biden as the direct opposite of Trump in terms of financial integrity. Through this rhetorical structure, the audience interprets Biden as the complete opposite of Trump in terms of financial integrity. It is worth mentioning that the other subcategories of “Equating and Contrasting” tool have null existence in this segment.

4. Implying and Assuming

“I get treated worse than **the Tea Party** got treated. A lot of people in there, deep down in **the IRS**, they treat me horribly. **We made a deal**, it was all settled, until I decided to run for president. I get treated very badly by the IRS, very unfairly, but we had a deal all done.”

Presupposition:

Trump refutes the implication of concealment by depicting himself as a victim of institutional bias, particularly targeting “the IRS”. The use of the definite noun phrase “the IRS” triggers the **Existential Presupposition**, assuming this institution exists as an entity that can treat Trump in specific ways. Instead of directly denying Biden’s accusations, Trump shifts the blame to the IRS, suggesting that he has been trying to resolve the matter but was treated unfairly. To reinforce this narrative, Trump uses the phrase “The Tea Party,” presupposing that the audience has prior knowledge about the group’s historical conflict with the IRS. By comparing his own experience with theirs, Trump constructs a parallel of oppression, further giving legitimacy to his claim of mistreatment.

Moreover, the phrase “we made a deal” represents a clear instance of **Logical Presupposition**, particularly through the use of a change-of-state verb. The verb “made” implies a turning from a previous unresolved condition to a new state of resolution. This assumes a prior mutual agreement between the IRS and Trump, reinforcing the idea that he was proactive and submissive in handling his tax matters before the current controversy appeared. This strategy helps Trump reframe the debate; instead of being like he is avoiding something, he makes it appear like he is being unfairly targeted by the system despite his efforts at transparency.

Implicature:

Trump implies that unnamed, possibly politically motivated officials within the IRS are targeting him. He claims to experience worse treatment from the IRS than the members of the Tea Party movement received. This implication flouts the Maxim of Quantity, as he doesn't assign who treats him badly, leaving the agents of injustice unclear. Yet the implicature is clear: Trump positions himself as a victim pursued by the IRS, which works as part of a "deep state" targeting outsiders like himself. Inside his ideological framework, Trump reframes Biden's accusations, such as tax evasion or lack of transparency, not by directly rebutting them with evidence, but by presenting himself as the target of unfair treatment.

5.Negating

"They keep talking about \$750, which I think is a filing fee. And it **wasn't written** whenever they write this". (**Syntactic Negation**)

Trump employs "Syntactic Negation" through the phrase "it wasn't written" to question the accuracy or legitimacy of the reported number. He directly negates the validity of the source material or reporting, positioning it as incorrect or misleading. By naming the \$750 as a "filing fee", Trump here redefines the amount not as a real tax payment, but as a trivial routine charge. This naming strategy joins with negation to deconstruct the claim of tax evasion and substitute it with an alternative claim of financial foresight, emphasized further by his frequent narratives of "I prepaid tens of millions in taxes". Concerning **Lexical and Morphological Negation**, they have null existence. And it is worth mentioning that those two types of negation have a similar case for the other analyzed samples.

6.Prioritizing

Information Structure:

Trump uses both foregrounding and backgrounding as rhetorical tools to direct audience attention and interpretation of his message. He foregrounds emotionally loaded information, such as prepaying "**tens of millions of dollars**" in taxes, at the end of clauses to create maximum attention. By using this strategic placement, Trump faces accusations that he paid only \$750 in taxes, reframing himself as financially responsible.

Conversely, Trump backgrounds the unfavorable information by putting it in subordinate clauses or presenting it in a way that reduces its importance. As an example, he asserts, **“They keep talking about \$750, which I think is a filing fee”**. In this case, the amount of money, which is the subject of debate, \$750, is relegated to a subordinate clause and is dismissed as merely a filing fee. This structural change lessens the severity of the accusation and doubts its legitimacy. Therefore, it makes Trump trivialize essential statements by rephrasing them as false or irrelevant. All in all, Trump manipulates the audience’s attention through controlling the flow of information structure, giving prominence to things that are good while paying little attention to details, which can destroy his position

Transformation:

Trump obscures certain elements of the narrative by employing this technique, especially passivization. He changes emphasis through passive voice when he claims that **“I get treated very badly by the IRS, very unfairly...”** creating a narrative of victimhood and systemic unfairness. Additionally, the passive construction in the sentence **“It wasn’t written whenever they write this”** excludes the party at fault, leaving room for an implication of carelessness or malice on the part of the media or institutions.

Subordination:

Trump also ideologically uses subordinate structure by backgrounding undesirable information and highlighting chosen facts and accusations. In statements such as **“As soon as we’re completed with the deal, I want to release it”**, the main clause **“I want to release it”** is foregrounded to emphasize Trump’s claimed transparency and willingness to release taxes. Meanwhile, the subordinate clause **“as soon as...”** functions to delay the action, thereby justifying the lack of current disclosure and deflecting accountability

Ideology and Power

Trump’s refutation reflects a number of ideological positions that align with his political messaging, particularly through the themes of law and order, victimhood, guilt by association, and national success. Trump emphasizes his financial accountability by repeatedly claiming he **“prepaid millions in taxes”**, reinforcing his image as financially responsible and law-

abiding to delegitimize Biden both politically and morally. Additionally, He portrays himself as an innocent target of systemic injustice, accusing the IRS of unfair treatment. This claim of victimhood reflects an ideology of populism that positions Trump as a warrior against corrupt institutions. By doing so, he gains sympathy from the frustrations of people who distrust the establishment. Trump also frames his position as a symbol of national pride, which is central to his political message, by using his business achievements against the perceived failure of Biden.

Finally, Trump uses a strategy of guilt by association, targeting Biden's family (his son) by casting doubts on his opponent without directly confronting him and supporting his own moral superiority simultaneously. In his statements, Trump maneuvers the perception of the viewers towards himself and also the perception of his opponent, Biden. He tries to weaken Biden's authority by accusing him and his son of accepting illegal payments from foreign entities, saying, "You made three and a half million dollars." Together, such ideological stands enable Trump to overwhelm the debate and present himself as an advocate of fairness, transparency, and national grandeur.

The style of Trump's response is confrontational and aggressive, employing direct accusations such as "You're the big man" and emotional appeals such as "It is terrible". This aggressive tactic seeks to overwhelm the discourse and put down Biden's defense, leaving little room to develop counterpoints. Trump relies a lot on repetition to assert his key points, making sure they resonate with the audience and countering any accusations made against him.

4.2 The Analysis of Biden's Speech

Extract 1

"Biden: I have not taken a penny from any foreign source ever in my life. We learned that this president paid 50 times the tax in China as a secret bank account with China, does business in China, and, in fact, is talking about me taking money? I have not taken a single penny from any country whatsoever, ever, number one. Number two, this is a president... I have released all of my tax returns, 22 years, go look at them, 22 years of my tax return. You have not released a single solitary year of your tax return. What

are you hiding? Why are you unwilling? The foreign countries are paying you a lot. Russia's paying you a lot. China's paying you a lot on your hotels and all your businesses all around the country, all around the world. And China's building a new road to a new golf course you have overseas. So, what's going on here? Release your tax return or stop talking about corruption... he's been saying this for four years, show us, just show us, stop playing around. You've been saying for four years you're going to release your taxes... Nobody knows, Mr. President. What they do know is you're not paying your taxes, or you're paying taxes that are so low, when last time he said, what he paid, he said, I only pay that little because I'm smart. I know how to game the system. Come on. Come on, folks.”

Naming and Describing

“We learned that this president paid 50 times the tax in China, has a secret bank account with China, does business in China, and in fact, is talking about me taking money?”

Noun choice:

Biden repeatedly refers to Trump utilizing the deictic phrase “this president”, a distancing and possibly derogatory descriptor. While grammatically neutral, this noun choice performs a strong ideological role in which it reflects a negative stance or attitude toward Trump. It marks Trump merely as the current officeholder but removes him of personalization and respect, thereby de-emphasizing his authority and undermining the legitimacy of his accusations. Instead of treating Trump as an equal, Biden uses the distancing noun “this” to describe him as an outsider, not belonging to the American community. This understated verbal technique allows Biden to reject Trump simultaneously on both transparency and presidential respect, portraying him as unfit for trust or serious discussion.

Noun Modifications

“A secret bank account with China”.

Here, Biden strengthens his refutation further through noun modification, especially in the phrase “a secret bank account with China”. The noun “account” is modified by the adjective “secret,” which presupposes hidden intentions and a lack of transparency. By adding the prepositional phrase “with China”, a country that was seen negatively during

the debate, Biden invokes a politically charged context and casts suspicion on Trump. This noun phrase turns the narrative, so instead of accusing Biden of foreign corruption, the attention is redirected toward Trump's own alleged financial implications. Moreover, the word "secret" indicates concealment, which weakens Trump's accusations against Biden while supporting Biden's counterclaim. By listing Trump's own ties in China and concluding with the ironic contrast "and in fact, is talking about me taking money?", Biden highlights Trump's hypocrisy. This rhetorical tactic not only rejects Trump's claim but also casts doubt on his moral authority to accuse others, thereby reinforcing Biden's refutation.

Representing Actions/ Events/ States

"What are you hiding?" (Material Action Intentional)

In this rhetorical question, Biden introduces a MAI process, where the verb "hiding" refers to a purposeful physical act of concealing something, such as (hiding tax returns or financial ties). This verb choice implies intention and an external, real-world consequence. By describing Trump's behavior through this process, Biden frames him as actively engaging in unethical practices to suppress information. This question ideologically serves to accuse Trump of proactively hiding evidence against him, thereby shifting the claims of corruption back to him. This framing undermines Trump's credibility, portraying him not as a passive figure but as one with clear intent and agency. Through this process type, the refutation achieves greater force by emphasizing Trump's agency in avoiding transparency and enhancing Biden's position as the more transparent and accountable figure.

"The foreign countries are paying you a lot. Russia's paying you a lot. China's paying you a lot..." (Material Action Intentional)

These statements employ MAI processes through the iterated use of the verb phrase "are paying", which represents Trump as the actual recipient of money from foreign nations. This verb selection highlights a purposeful action occurring in the real world, suggesting Trump is knowingly accepting financial benefits from both Russia and China. Furthermore, the verb "paying" establishes continuous financial relationships, emphasizing the idea of corruption or conflict of interest. By doing so, Biden flips Trump's original accusation and redirects it against Trump himself.

“He said, “I only pay that little because I’m smart. “I know how to game the system” (**Verbalization & Mental Cognition**)

Biden employs this quote as part of his refutation; it demonstrates Trump’s admission of manipulating the tax system for personal gain, making it a powerful ideological move. He highlights two distinct process types: verbalization, as in the phrase “he said”, and mental cognition, “I know”. The ideological function portrays Trump as an unethical manipulator of legal loopholes instead of a smart actor, thus elevating Biden’s image as the more ethical candidate.

Equating and Contrasting

“I have released all of my tax returns... You have not released a single solitary year of your tax return”. (**Parallelism**)

Biden, here, refutes Trump’s accusation of corruption and foreign financial ties by using constructed opposition through parallelism. This parallel clause structure creates a clear and direct contrast between Biden’s transparency and Trump’s secrecy. The repetition of the verb “released” with different subjects (“I” vs. “You”) serves to emphasize Biden’s openness while drawing attention to Trump’s lack of disclosure. Through this strategy, Biden turns the accusation, implying that Trump is the one with something to conceal. These statements simultaneously reduce Trump’s claim of authority while making Biden’s position appear more sincere and trustworthy. The ideological implication here is that it creates a worldview in which honesty and openness (embodied by Biden) are opposed to concealment and potential corruption (associated with Trump). By doing so, Biden strengthens his position as a person of integrity and casts doubt on Trump’s, effectively weakening the power of Trump’s original argument.

“Release your tax return or stop talking about corruption”. (**Converses**)

Here, Biden presents a binary contrast to refute Trump’s ongoing accusations of corruption. Trump frequently claims that Biden performs unethical foreign business dealings, implying corruption. In response, Biden creates a mutually exclusive opposition by claiming that Trump cannot discuss corruption until he has proven his own transparency, especially through releasing his tax returns. The statement creates a complementary

opposition: either Trump has to reveal his tax returns, or he must stop talking about corruption. The discourse presents these two options as complete opposites so that doing one would invalidate the other. These binary positions Trump as hypocritical and inauthentic, while strengthening the idea that transparency is a precondition for credibility in accusations of corruption. Ultimately, this stark contrast not only undermines Trump's argument but also elevates Biden's position as more ethically consistent.

Implying and Assuming

"He's been saying this for four years, show us, just show us, stop playing around. You've been saying for four years you're going to release your taxes".

The statement employs Iterative Presupposition combined with Conversational Implicature to reduce Trump's credibility levels instead of explicitly accusing him. The phrase "for four years" appears twice to establish an iterative presupposition about Trump's repeated promise to reveal his tax returns throughout years. Iterative triggers such as time-based repetition, according to Jeffries (2010a), serve to naturalize a narrative of incomplete promises. The presupposition here is that Trump has failed to keep his four-year promise about tax returns, which reinforces the belief that he is deceptive in his actions.

In addition, the commands "show us, stop playing around" operate as conversational implicatures that violate Grice's maxim of relation and manner. These demanding declarations imply both frustration and suspicion. By using the phrase "stop playing around," Biden accuses Trump of intentionally avoiding honest disclosure. While not directly accusing Trump of deceit, this implication encourages viewers to infer that he hides something, which supports the refutation through implied dishonesty. Ultimately, the power of implication and assumption depends on its ability to embed ideology subtly, making it appear natural or common-sense to the audience.

Negating

"I have not taken a penny from any foreign source ever in my life. [...] I have not taken a single penny from any country, whatsoever, ever, number one". (**Syntactic Negation**)

In this instance, Biden dismisses a version of reality in which he is guilty of taking foreign funds. While claiming his innocence, he simultaneously constructs and disproves the hypothetical scenario implied by Trump's accusations. The act of negating ("I have not taken a penny...") pushes this hypothetical reality into the audience's awareness, only to reject it completely. By constantly using negative constructions, Biden attempts to remove any possible interpretations or doubts regarding his financial integrity. He frames himself as completely independent from corruption or external influence. So, through the Negating tool, Biden not only rejects opposition claims but also builds his ethical reputation as an honest and transparent leader.

Prioritizing

Information Structure:

Biden, in this extract, structures his refutation by foregrounding key accusations and denials into the final position of the clause, ensuring that the most powerful content receives the audience's attention as fresh and focal information. He emphasizes, "I have not taken a single penny from any foreign source ever in my life", defending himself against any accusations. This placement ensures that the audience pays more attention to Biden's denial instead of Trump's allegation.

Biden also draws attention to accusations against Trump by putting them in sentence-final positions in which they gain emphasis. Phrases such as "Russia's paying you a lot" and "China's paying you a lot" are framed so that the important information (Trump's claimed financial entanglement) is the last thing heard, raising its salience. In this manner, Biden turns the subject of his speech from himself to Trump's integrity, encouraging the audience to raise questions about Trump's credibility instead of his.

Additionally, the way Biden structured his argument reinforces his refutation. He first emphasizes his innocence, then contrasts it with Trump's refusal to release his taxes, and finally makes a direct challenge: "Release your tax return or stop talking about corruption". This logical progression creates the ideological effect, making Biden appear principled and transparent, while Trump is portrayed as a dishonest and secretive figure.

Therefore, Biden reshapes the narrative in his favor effectively through the use of information structure.

Ideology and Power

In this part of the debate, Biden refutes claims in a direct, forceful, and fact-based manner. Through his response, he tries to disprove Trump's claim by rejecting any financial ties to foreign sources. Biden turns his attention simultaneously to Trump by exposing what he frames as Trump's own moral and legal failings, like tax problems and secret business transactions. As a result, Biden takes control of the conversation by turning from defending his position to attacking his opponent.

When it comes to power, Biden is seen as an open-minded, accountable person who supports basic democratic ideas of fairness, honesty, and trust from the public. He points out that he has released 22 years of tax returns and questions how secret Trump's money dealings are.

Table: 1

The Overall Frequency and Percentage of Results of Trump's Speech

Critical Stylistic Tools	Frequency	Percentage
Naming and Describing	26	21.6%
Representing Actions/Events/States	32	26.6%
Equating and Contrasting	13	10.8%
Implying and Assuming	20	16.6%
Negating	10	8.3%
Prioritizing	19	15.8%
Total	120	100%

Table: 2

The Overall Frequency and Percentage of Results of Biden's Speech

Critical Stylistic Tools	Frequency	Percentage
Naming and Describing	23	21.4%
Representing Actions/Events/States	26	24.2%
Equating and Contrasting	11	10.2%
Implying and Assuming	14	13 %
Negating	12	11 %
Prioritizing	21	19.6%
Total	107	100%

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that Politicians use refutation to accomplish political agendas other than to defend and secure them. More specifically, they intend to disclose the fragility and feebleness of their opponents.

Refutation is not merely a direct contradiction but a strategic and linguistically complicated act. It is built through both overt and covert discursive strategies that have wider ideological and persuasive purposes. This demonstrates that refutation in political discourse is not reducible to a singular speech act but arises from a variety of linguistic tools used strategically throughout the discourse.

The linguistic realization of refutation is infused with ideological implications. Each textual-conceptual tool employed in refutation, whether implying, naming, contrasting, negating, or representing, works to position the speaker favorably while undermining the credibility of the opponent. This supports the notion that refutation is not merely an argumentative rebuttal; it is a form of ideological positioning.

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